

JMBC Bible Study #5: The Ten Commandments

Scripture: Exodus 19: 3-6; 20: 1-21

Lesson Objective: To help the student understand two major principles about the Law.

- I. The foundation of the Law was God's redemption and care for his people
- II. The purpose of the law was, and is, three fold:
 - A. It showed them the character of God.
 - B. It showed them how to respond to God's goodness, and how to live.
 - C. It moved them to repentance, and thus closer to God.

I. The foundation of the Law was God's redemption and care for his people.

God gave the Law because he cared for his people. We have seen in Exodus 3-14 how he had heard the cries of his people and had at just the right time brought them out of "cruel bondage" with signs and wonders. But that is only part of the story. In chapter 15: 25 God provided a piece of wood that would make the water "sweet" for the people to drink. In chapter 16 God provided manna and quail as food for the people to eat. And in chapter 17 God told Moses to strike the rock with his staff, again he provided water for the people of Israel to drink.

Thus it was when Israel came to the foot of Mt. Sinai, God called to Moses with these words: "You yourselves have seen what I do to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." (19:4). In these words God is reminding the people of what he has done, and why he has done it.

- A. He judged Egypt with a mighty judgement, and brought Israel across the Red Sea with a show of great power.
- B. He provided for Israel along the way with all her needs, so that one could say that she was "carried on eagles' wings". Thus far her journey had been not been filled with suffering.
- C. The purpose of all that had happened was to bring Israel to God ("brought you to myself"). God desired a personal relationship with the people of Israel. They would trust and obey him and He would provide a salvation and a future for them.

Moses listens to God and then told the elders of the people what God had said. They agreed to do everything that God said. So Moses told the people to prepare themselves because in three days God's would visit the mountain with power. No one but Moses could go up the mountain to be in the presence of the Lord. Chapter 24 continues the story. Moses went to the foot of the mountain with Aaron and the elders, then proceeded further with Joshua his aid, and then proceeded further up alone, until he reached the top (Chapter 24: 18)

Moses received the Ten Commandments on the mountain (Chapter 20: 1-17). It also seems that he received the instructions about making the Tabernacle (Chapters 25-31). But it may well be that as he was writing the Ten Commandments in the book we call Exodus, he placed the Ten Commandments in Chapter 20, together with other laws and instructions that God had given or would give, in Chapters 21:2 through Chapter 23: 33.

But our concern is with the Ten Commandments. So important is God's relationship to Israel that God places in at the very beginning of the commandments, in what we call the "Prologue" (20:2) "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of Israel."

This Prologue is very important because it establishes the identity on the one who is giving these commandments. He is the one who has cared for and delivered Israel. He is the God who is all-powerful, and who expects worship and obedience from His people. Thus, God gives these commandments. The first four relate to aspects of our relationship with God.

2 "You shall have no other gods before me." The NIV footnote says that "before" can be translated "besides". God is a jealous God. He does not accept second-place worship. Nor does he even allow for any "god" to be beside him. God will not tolerate us worshiping anything else on earth. We are to only worship him.

3. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God..." This second commandment enlarges and explains the first command. We are not to make an image or "an idol" of anything—anything at all, whether it is above earth, on earth, or in the waters of earth. This commandment primarily refers to a representation of God himself- but it also applies to anything else man wants to worship. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit in truth. This commandment contains in both a warning and a promise. God will punish even the children of those who hate him by making idols, but he will show love to thousands of generations of those who love him, worship him in spirit and truth, an keep his commandments. Paul helped us understand idolatry better when he said that greed is idolatry. (Colossians 3: 5)

4. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." In this original context misusing God's name was to use God's name when claiming something to

be true (“to swear”) that was actually false, or to make a vow using God’s name and break it. Jesus renews this commandment when he tells us not to swear by anything, whether in heaven or on earth. (Matthew 5: 33-37)

7. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God...” The fourth commandment was the sign of the covenant, but it went back to the creation itself. The Sabbath day was made for man: “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed.” (Ex. 23: 12) It was also a sign of Israel’s covenant with God and her dependence on what God had done for the nation, and well as how he would provide for them in the future. (Deuteronomy 5: 15) thus, a person could be stoned to death for breaking the Sabbath. (Numbers 15: 32-35) Jesus says that the “Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2: 27), and goes about doing good on the Sabbath day. More importantly, he says to seek God’s kingdom and righteousness and the God will provide our needs.

The next six commandments give us instructions about man’s relationship with man.

12 “Honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” Paul calls this “the first commandment with a promise” (Ephesians 6:2). The reason for this was the setting of the commandment. Hebrew parents were responsible for teaching their children the law of God (Deut. 6: 6-9; Prov. 2). To dishonour ones parents was to disregard their teaching and disobey the law of God.

13. “You shall not murder.” The older translation of this commandment was “Thou shall not kill”, but the word “to kill” חָרַג. However, when Jesus renews this commandment in the New Testament, he speaks of anger. Murder, in the way it is used in the Old Testament, begins with anger. Jesus says, “anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement (Matt. 5: 22)

14. “You shall not commit adultery.” Strictly speaking, adultery involved a sexual relationship between a married, or betrothed person, and someone who is not their legitimate husband, wife, or intended. The laws of Israel were very strict about this. When Jesus renews this commandment in the new covenant, he again goes to the heart of man and says that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. And anyone who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery, as well as the one who marries her. (Matt. 5: 27-32)

15. “Thou shall not steal.” This had many sides in the Old Testament. “Do not defraud (cheat) your neighbor. “Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.” “Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the rich.” Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or quantity.” Paul says “He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Eph 4:28

16. “Thou shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” First of all, this applied to testimony in court. The penalty for falsely accusing someone was severe. If you accused someone of murder, which was punishable by death, and you were found to be lying, you would be put to death. However, in Leviticus the command clearly applies to all untruth: “Do not steal. “Do not lie. “Do not deceive one another” (Lev 19:11), and in the New Testament Paul tell us “Do not lie to one another.” (Col 3: 9)

17. “You shall not covet your neighbors house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his manservant nor his maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” Disobeying ones parents, stealing, lying, and adultery can all be proven by testimony in court. But coveting is a matter of the heart. It is the law that the rich young ruler had broken when he came to Jesus (and could not follow him because of his riches.” NO ONE can live a life free of coveteousness.

The law was given to Israel as a wonderful gift (Psalm 1; 119). It had three purposes. First, it showed Israel the character of God. God is the righteous and just one. To perfectly live according to the law is to live a righteous and just life.

Israel, as we have seen, was to be characterized by justice and righteousness. If she obeyed God and kept his commandments she “would be to God a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” If she kept the commandments of God she would be blessed; if not, she would be cursed.

But no person can keep the Law perfectly. Paul says “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.” Gal 3:24 As it was in the beginning, the law is meant to move us towards a deeper and deeper personal relationship with God. It is meant to point us towards forgiveness. Not all the law of the Old Covenant was renewed in the New Covenant. Jesus gave us the Ten Commandments in a new form to point us towards a transformed life. But we cannot obey the spirit of the Law until we receive the forgiveness and freedom that the Law’s Author intends us to have. The Law, something good, shows our sin and our condemnation. In Christ, there is now no condemnation because the law of the Spirit of Life has set us free from the Law of sin and death. (Romans 8:1)